

Israel Hits Lebanon Again, Rebuffs Hezbollah Offer

No Deal Possible Until Rocket Attacks Stop, Israelis Say

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Washington Post Foreign Service

JERUSALEM, July 30—Israel vowed to continue shelling and bombing southern Lebanon today, rejecting an offer by Hezbollah to halt rocket attacks on northern Israel in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from all of Lebanon.

Israeli warplanes struck a dozen targets in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley, naval gunboats shelled coastal towns and heavy artillery pounded south Lebanese villages for the sixth consecutive day.

Twenty-five more Katyusha rockets launched by Hezbollah, or Party of God—the Iranian-linked Lebanese Shiite Muslim group—fell on northern Israel and the 15-mile-wide “security zone” Israel occupies in southern Lebanon, but no casualties were reported.

According to U.N. officials, 120 people have been killed and about 500 wounded, mostly Lebanese, since Israel last Sunday launched its most widespread aerial offensive in Lebanon in a decade. Three Israelis have been killed, including one soldier in the security zone. The Israeli attack was to avenge the deaths of seven soldiers this month by Hezbollah and Palestinian guerrillas.

Diplomatic sources here said the United States was still attempting to quell the fighting in advance of Secretary of State Warren Christopher’s planned visit to the region next week. For the first time today, there were signs of a possible movement toward a cease-fire.

In a statement issued in Beirut, Said Hasan Nasrallah, the general secretary of Hezbollah, offered, with conditions, to stop the rocket launchings.

“We announce . . . that halting rocket attacks on settlements in occupied northern Palestine [Israel] cannot be achieved but with the complete and permanent halt of aggression against villages and civilians . . . and the stopping of Israeli attacks from air, land and sea on all Lebanese territories,” the statement said.

Israel has long maintained that it will only withdraw from the security zone—set up in 1985 in the aftermath of the Lebanon war—when it is convinced that the border

is secure and can be kept that way by the Lebanese government.

Nasrallah said the rocket attacks had been launched by Islamic Resistance, the Hezbollah’s military wing, in response to Israeli attacks on civilians.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said this week that Israel would curtail the offensive if the rocket attacks stopped, but several dozen rockets have been fired in each of the past few days.

Katyusha rockets, with a range of more than six miles, can be fired from launching tubes mounted on the back of a truck or from a single tube. Since the launchers are highly mobile, they have eluded Israel’s aircraft and artillery.

The Hezbollah offer was rebuffed by Israel. After a Cabinet meeting this afternoon in Tel Aviv, Israeli Defense Ministry spokesman Oded Ben-Ami announced that the government had not discussed the offer and would continue the offensive until the rocket attacks stopped.

Rabin has won widespread public support for the offensive, according to a new nationwide poll of Israeli Jews published today. Ninety-three percent of those questioned said they approved of the action. While 62 percent said the current level of force was sufficient, 27 percent called for using more, and only 7 percent said too much had been deployed.

But there continued to be discontent in the leftist Meretz bloc in Rabin’s governing coalition. At the Cabinet meeting today, leftist ministers proposed that Israel permit some of the Lebanese civilians who have been driven from their homes to return, state-run Israel radio reported.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, speaking to reporters, said Israel does not intend to escalate the Lebanon operation into a full-scale war. “The operation in Lebanon is not a war,” he said. “And we do not intend to carry it into a war. It is an operation of limited purpose, and the minute the Hezbollah will stop shelling the northern part of Israel, the operation will be over.”

Asked whether Israel intends to expand the security zone, as some have suggested is the goal of the operation, Peres responded, “No sir . . . we have decided clearly against it.”